

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: HAROLD ADAMS
INTERVIEWER: YILDERAY ERDENER
DATE: APRIL 21, 1989**

**Y = YILDERAY
H = HAROLD**

SG-LA-T502

Y: ...April 21st, 1989. And uh, I'm with Harold Adams. Harold gave me a picture of him working in the mill. Which mill?

H: Which mill? That was Stevens Mill.

Y: J.P. Stevens?

H: J.P. Stevens, yeah. It was the original mills built in 1813.

Y: 1813?

H: Yup.

Y: How do you know that?

H: Oh, it used to be on the building, right on the street. The mill is there no more you know, but uh,(--)

Y: It's not there anymore?

H: No. They tore it down, they build condominiums right there.

Y: The whole building, they tore it (--)

H: They tore the whole building right down.

Y: And what year was this picture taken, do you know?

H: This picture here, um god.

Y: I mean an estimation.

H: Ten, fifteen, twenty, I'd say it was, oh let's see now. I'm seventy-five now.

Y: You estimate the picture was taken in 19, between 1955, 50, (H: Yeah, somewhere about) 55, 1960? And who took that picture?

H: The mill itself. That's the one they had (--) No, wait a minute. Did they have that in the (--) The mill themselves took that picture I guess.

Y: And you were working as what?

H: Well we were working as picker hands.

Y: What's this called?

H: Picker hand. (Y: Picker?) Preparing, this is the preparing department. See, this is all, to begin with this is all different kinds of wool waste. Now we run it through the machine, and it treats it with emulsion, so much oil and water. That is to stop the static through the rest of the machine. If you ran straight wool through machines, you'd be getting static electricity all over the, all over the frames, see. We used to put that wool, that oil and water, we call it emulsion.

Y: What do you call it?

H: Emulsion.

Y: Emulsion.

H: Yeah, emulsion. (Y: Uh huh) And that used to stop the static electricity, and also it held the fibers together that they would run better.

Y: That's interesting. I didn't know about the static uh, electricity. (H: Oh yeah) So that was (-)

H: And you see, now Stevens Mill, is this going on there, or what? Is this (--) All right. Well Stevens Mill you know, was women's wear, this mill here. All women's wear, and it was mostly reclaimed wool. All different, even rags, they had a rag picker. It used to chew up the rags, and it would come out you know, in strings of wool, back almost the way it was. And they used to add maybe five, or ten percent of that in the, you know, in the product. And it would save a lot of money like that, you know what I mean? I forget now what wool was a pound, but this maybe was one tenth of you know, what, what real wool would cost. Most, they would put some good wool, and most of it, or even the reclaimed wool, like dyed wool. It was died.

Y: Reclaimed? How do you call it? Reclaimed?

H: Reclaimed.

Y: What does it mean exactly?

H: Well it means to use it over, to claim it over and use it again. Reclaim, you know it's reclaimed wool.

Y: So you mix that with good one.

H: One good one, and they used to make some beautiful cloth. You'd never know it when it was done you know, when uh (--)

Y: And how long (--) Well let's talk about static a little bit more. Is there anything, anymore to say about uh (--) I think this is dangerous. (H: About static electricity?) Could it be dangerous? I mean that could shock (--)

H: Well not really. You would get a little shock you know, if you (--) Like even us sometime when we were throwing the wool in there when it was dry, you know, once in a while you'd touch the frame of a machine we were working on, you'd get a little shock, you know. Of course it wasn't dangerous, but uh (--)

Y: And you said you stopped it by putting oil in warm water?

H: Warm water, yes, yes.

Y: Mixed the oil, and what kind of oil?

H: Yeah, well uh, (Y: unclear) there was too kinds of oil. There was, I know the numbers, you know? There was 56 regular oil.

Y: What regular oil?

H: Well they used to get it in 50 gallon drums. It come from the oil company. I don't know exactly (--) And then the anti-static oil was AS40, anti static oil. Well we used to only put maybe 10 gallons of that, about 50 gallons of oil, and about oh, 3,000 gallons of water. That used to, we put that through the floor and it would go in a big big tank, big iron tank. And they put steam on it. They opened the steam valve, and that would heat it up, and it would bubble and mix, mix all up, you know. And then when we wanted to put it on, you know, on this wool, we used to draw it up into a tank right above the machine. And as this wool was going through this machine here, it would spray the oil onto the wool.

Y: So this is, I though people would wash the wool to get the oil out.

H: Before yes, before it started. But what they washed the wool (--) When they washed the

wool, wool, when you first got it from a sheep, (Y: It is not uh (--) it's, this is not from a sheep, this is not straight from a sheep. (Y: No?) When you, a real, a worsted textile mill, it was always, years ago it was 100% wool. And when you got it from the sheep, it was sticky and hard, they had to wash it. You could never run it through anything. How do I explain it. (Y: I understand) It was so solid and sticky that it had to be washed. And then they found out after they washed it out, that was all lanolin.

Y: It was what?

H: Lanolin. That's what they used in all cosmetics you know? So that was a big product for you know, when they save it. They used to save that and sell it to these cosmetics places.

Y: So it is washed and what is the next step?

H: Well it was washed and then it went to the card room. That was in worsted. The card room, it went to the combing room. The combing room used to comb out all of the short fibers and all the vegetable matter, you know what I mean? Because you know, when you get a raw piece of wool from a sheep, it's all grass and sticky stuff and you know, that a comb would comb that all out. And then, like what it got out of there was noils, they used to call it noils, "not over an inch long", that was the fiber of the wool. Now they used to use that in woolen mills. They'd use maybe 30%, or 40% of that in woolen mills. And then you know, in the regular woolen, woolen products like I say, like women's wear, anything thick, or blankets, they could use that in blankets. And also like I say, in a, in a, now this here, where we mix this (--)

Y: What are you doing exactly here?

H: Well we're putting in this what they call a picker machine. (Y: Picker?) Picker, P I C K E R. Now we would run this two or three times. We'd run it in the machine. It used to, there was a fan that would shoot it up into the bins, and the thing in there would turn it around and spread it around so it would mix, you know, all these colors, you know. So we would do that maybe two or three time. So it would be mixed good. You know, they wouldn't like, when they dyed it, you know there wouldn't be any, it would always be you know, what this would dye, but it would have to be a dark color, you know. But of course we never always ran this. This is just a sample of this kind of stuff. Usually it was all white. You know, or all, not all white, but a white and whatever, whatever shade they wanted to make they'd mix colors into that, you know. Like now this suit here, right there, right? You think that, what would you think would be in there?

Y: This is synthetic. This is not (--)

H: Well even if it's synthetic, if it's synthetic they still had to do it the same way. That's not a solid color you know. That's, there's probably 80 or 90% black in there, with 10% white to make it a gray. I don't know if they could, I don't know if they ever could dye a piece gray.

Y: So what was your, what was your title? You were uh (--)

H: Oh, we were just machine tenders on this here. We called them machine tender. (Y:

Machine tender?) Yeah, yeah. That's all. After awhile I got to be in charge of this department, you know?

Y: Yeah. So what and when the wool sorter comes in?

H: Well wool sorters, like I say, we didn't have wool sorters in the woolen mill. That was in the Worsted mill. Wool sorters, when they got the thing from the sheep, did you ever see a sheep sheared? A whole thing is in one piece you know? Now different parts of that is finer wool than the other. And these wool sorters, they ripped it apart. They had, they sat at a table like this, had a whole bunch of wool there, you know. And they'd pull it over, and they'd pull it under. Pull some there, some there. The best grades they throw in one place, you know, and some other. Like the, well I don't know if I should say this now. The part from the behind, and the urine used to stain the wool you know. So that wouldn't be first class wool. That would be you know, maybe some of the, I don't know what grade. I never worked in the wool shop, but I know what I'm talking about. That would have to be maybe, maybe some dark color, you know. You couldn't put that in a white you know, and expect it to come out you know, white.

Y: But it would be a good quality?

H: Oh it's good quality, yes. And maybe it was, might have even been stronger quality, you know what I mean?

Y: So the wool sorter did sort according to the length also?

H: Well I don't know about the length. I know the part of the body they knew, you know. You'd get a whole, the whole thing from the one sheep would be in one piece. Like a blanket, you know, the way it's so (--) They'd pull it over, and like I say, they knew what they were doing. They like I say, throw some here, some there, some there. And when that was all, when they were done, well they used to throw it into a bin, you know. Wool sorters made a pretty good wage, because like I say, they had a little trade there, you know what I mean?

Y: Is it considered a trade?

H: Oh yeah, wool sorting was considered a trade, yes.

Y: I also heard that they had soft hands because of the natural grease [unclear].

H: Oh well, they had to have strong hands too, because when you pull that apart you know, that, that's not, it's not easy. You keep doing that all day long and you know, you must have, but they would have soft hands, because that was a 100% lanolin, you know, from the sheep.

Y: You couldn't get soft hands from this kind of process?

H: Well no.

Y: Let me see how soft your hands are?

H: Well now, but like this here, it wouldn't be lanolin anymore, you know what I mean? It would, it would be oil and water, and that, but it wouldn't be lanolin like you know, when a sheep, like right from the sheep. But like I say, we always had clean hands. You know, because you, you were handling, you know, it was clean wool, you know.

Y: But you are putting oil in it, [unclear].

H: Oh yes, we were put in what I call the emulsion. That's, we were putting that. We'd throw this, this machine now, wait a minute. Yeah, well see this machine where it's going up here? Okay.

Y: What is this machine called?

H: That's a picker. (Y: Picker) Yeah. Again, I don't know if I told you, but. Now see, what we call this was random wool. Random colors and random you know, grades. Usually, I don't know what they, they sold this for, you know, what kind of cloth they made out of it, but usually you would have maybe four or five different colors, and they want to make, well anything. Like now this is, this is wool. I don't know if there's wool in it, but you can see there's gray, and there's black in there. And well, you, if you were making like an oxford gray, you know, an oxford gray is sort of like this color. There's all kinds, all shades of oxford gray. There's a dark oxford, and light oxford, and you know, lighter. Well the more white wool they would put in with that black, you know, would make the shade. And you had to put the right, the same amount. Now this here don't matter, but when you make an irregular lot, you had to put percentages, and you had to weigh up these, every percentage. Now we maybe weigh a thousand pound of white, maybe two hundred pounds of black, or another thing, no only black, most colors of woven wear, they are not one solid color. You might look at them, you think they are. You know, but women's skirts, if you look at them, they're always sort of a tweed, or whatever, or you know. Well you maybe have five or six different colors that to mix in. That's why we had to mix these good, so they're come out, the whole thread when it came out would be you know, the same color. And who had charge of that stuff is the dye house office. They had patterns, you know, with percentages of different shades of wool, and they would make out the amounts. And then you had to weigh up the amounts of each color and each, sometime it was different, even different grades, different uh, well yeah, different grades of wool, you know. And you had to weigh you know, to the pound. In fact, when you had samples, if you ran samples, it might be an ounce. You might have to, if they were making just a small sample, it would be ounces, you know?

Y: Would they take that, that oil you put in, later out?

H: Oh yes! Later, later it would be taken out. When it went to the finishing room they would wash that out. And then,(--)

Y: That oil is put just to avoid the static.

H: Just for the, to make it run good and for static. You know, like I say, to make it run good

through the mill to hold the thread together, the fibers, you know?

Y: How long did you work at this uh?

H: Oh, I worked there about 20 years.

Y: The same job?

H: No, no, no. I, I worked, this (--) Now when I was doing this I was just helping out, because we were short help that day. I used to weigh these lots. I was the head weigher. Like I say, now you've got a sheet of paper, see? And it would be a percentage on one corner, one thing, and types of wool, and colors of wool. And you had to weigh up every, every one of them to what it was. Like all right, say 20% black. 15% blue. 13% yellow, or whatever. I'm just thinking percentages, I don't know exactly what the percentages are now. But they, that's why we put it through here. We mixed it all together. Like I say, when you, if you had a lot of colors like that you mix it maybe three times. And then you'd look at it, well the boss would look at it right, you know, if I thought it was not right they'd have to run it again, you know, to make sure it was mixed.

Y: Yeah. So this guy, Patrick, (H: Yeah), Patrick was the main person who was doing that, or he [unclear].

H: No, he was just an ordinary material handler. This was only one machine, we had four different machines in this room, you know.

Y: Four the same?

H: Oh yeah! Yeah! Four the same.

Y: And you worked for twenty years at (--) (H: in Stevens, yeah) Twenty years between what years, do you remember?

H: Oh no, I don't remember. I don't remember.

Y: And is it an enjoyable job? Did you enjoy what you were doing?

H: Well yes. Like I say, now in high tech, when I went to work in Western Electric, you were on your job eight hours. When they rang the bell for coffee break you took maybe five minutes, or ten. When that next bell rang you had to be at your job, you know what I mean? But in a case like this, now we have a break, whatever you know, smoke break, or coffee break. Well they'd be a little leeway. You wouldn't have to rush back, you know what I mean. It all depends how the work was going. Now if we had a lot of work ahead of us, well we'd take our break and we'd come back and do our work. No, no sweat, you know, no, no, no pushing you. And if like I say, if we had, if we were like ahead of our job and everything, well we could take an extra five minutes, or ten minutes. Nobody would say anything, you know what I mean?

Y: But at Western Electric, [H: Hm?] Western Electric you should be (--)

H: Yeah, we had a special area, you know, for smoking area. They used to even have a railing around it so you wouldn't get out of there for smoking, you know?

Y: Where, at Western Electric? (H: No, at the) At the mills?

H: At the mill. Well Western Electric, yes, they had smoking areas too.

Y: But at Western Electric you should be on time [H: all the time] back.

H: All the time. All the time. It was like a school. You know, when you recess, the bell rings for recess? You got to go right in, or you got to come right out. I don't know when you went to school, but when I did, when the bell rang you had to, your recess started. When the bell rang you go back to work right away. And it, and like in Western Electric if you didn't go back there right away, you, they used to give our slips. After you got so many slips they'd fire you, you know?

Y: So it was, in short you enjoyed what you were doing here?

H: Well yes. And now see, this was a lesser paying an hour job. But there was things that you know, was just as good, you know. I mean now Western Electric has a pension. But now this company here, they started about, oh it must be maybe five years before I retired. They started a "share the wealth program." Every year

Y: Share what?

H: Share the wealth. Every year out of their profits they set aside so much money for each employee, and they invested it in you know?

Y: J.P. Stevens did that?

H: Yes, yes. Now when I retired from there I think I got about twenty-four hundred dollars. Well that's when they closed down, see? But that was only, if they would have had that for twenty years I would have had four times that much. Some of them people, you know, like this, you know, J.P. Stevens was always, was always a good mill to work for because they had, they always had steady work, you know? And if they didn't, now this is before my time. When there was uh, when there was a slack period in the mill, J.P. Stevens, well I wasn't J.P. I don't know which Stevens it was. They lived, there's a Stevens in North Andover, he had a home you know. Somebody lives there from Stevens. They used to take some of the workers out of here, and they'd take them, they'd work them in if they wanted to, they'd work in the barn, or they'd work in the field cutting the grass or anything, just to get them a pay, you know?

Y: That's nice.

H: Yeah, well it's good. Like I say, it was a good company. And now I'm talking about before

they spread out. I don't know. Now they had mills in Lawrence, Andover, Dracut. (Y: Stevens?) Stevens. Dracut, uh, there's two place in New Hampshire. I can't think of the names just off hand now, but that's where the finishing mills were up in (--) And uh, and then they started to go down South, you know? I don't know. They must have about ten mills down South now. But that's the idea. They thought they could hold these people from being in the union, which they did too, because there was never, there was a union here for a little while, but it didn't last long, because, like they spread their work out and there was a lot of slack period. So the people couldn't do nothing about it. That was the only jobs around in them days, you know, so they had to work without a union. But in a way it was just as well, because you know, unions are good. They do a lot of good. If there was not unions, you know, of course now I don't know how it would be. But them days they could do anything to you without a union. Like I say, in the Wood Mill now, without a union I had to go in there everyday whether I worked or not. And I told this story before. The boss would come out, and we'd be like a bunch of sheep. He'd say you, you, you, you, he'd pick out his favorites, or his, somebody he knew. You go to work, the rest of your go home, come back tomorrow. You know, and you, if you got two or three days a week, well you were lucky. Some, even his favorites they didn't get no full week.

Y: But did you work, when, during the slack periods did you work at the barn or something, or you always worked (--)

H: Oh, that was before my time. When I worked here we always worked steady. In fact I, like when I was working, now I told you this story before. My boss was sick and I don't know if I should tell you this, but my boss was sick. He used to be sick four or five days a week. And I was doing his job, right? So, so I could make a good pay I used to come in from six to twelve at night a be a watchman. See, I used to be a watchman. And that would be extra work. That would be time and a half, and then I would get a good pay out of this week. Now I, I could do that. Most of the time was when some of the watchman would call up sick or something, they'd call me, you want to come in and do this? But then in the summer on vacation, I used to work you know, weeks at a time doing this, and would bring up my pay good, you know?

Y: Did you retire from Stevens?

H: No, no, I retired from [unclear] Wilson. Steel workers. Steel shelving, lockers (--)

Y: So from Stevens, where did you go?

H: From Stevens, uh, yeah, I went to Andrew Wilson from Stevens.

Y: Wilson?

H: Yeah, Andrew Wilson. They were a big name in lockers. And we used to ship stuff all over the world.

Y: W I L S O N?

H: Yeah. Yeah, Wilson.

Y: Wilson. And you were retired from that company, Wilson?

H: No I retired from Wilson's.

Y: Right. So um, what other favoritism (--) Some people talk about favoritism in the mills.

H: Favoritism?

Y: Yeah. Like some people, I guess it did not happen here, but some people used to bring vegetables, or small presents, gifts to their boss. (H: That's why I say) Can you tell me a little bit about that?

H: Well yeah. I don't, I ain't going to mention any nationalities, but that was a thing. They used to bring the boss fruit and vegetables and wine. That went on. But see that was before the union too, you know, because when the union come in they wouldn't stand for that. They still might have done it on the sly, but the union would never stand for anything like that.

Y: Well I guess the Italians were most like that.

H: Well I don't know.

Y: You don't want to say that, but I know that was the case.

H: Probably other nationalities too. You know, I (--)

Y: So they raised their own vegetables, and (--)

H: Oh yeah, well in them days everybody had a garden in their back yard, or they had a small farm or something, you know. And even, well not, not when I was growing up, but when I was a child we had a back yard as big as this parking lot, and my father always planted vegetables. And he didn't have to. My father was a boss steam fitter at a Lawrence Gas Company, and he used to make a good pay. But that was the thing in them days. You made a garden and you had your own fresh vegetables, and you know. And even potatoes and that. We used to have a potato bin in the cellar. And my father used to make sauerkraut. I don't know if you know what sauerkraut is? But he used to make his own sauerkraut. And you know?

Y: That was what? The 1920's, 1930's? 1940's?

H: Uh yeah. Let's see now. I was born in 1914. I'd say, you can say the 1920's. Yeah. Yeah, 1920s. Yeah.

Y: So it was not because your father needed that, but it must have been a hobby.

H: No, but that was the thing to do. It was a hobby for everybody in them days. In them days there's no supermarket. You go in the supermarket, pick out everything you want. There was a

corner grocery store, and there was maybe a couple, one market in each uh, you know, meat market, well that's like a grocery store too. But in each district there was not a million stores you know, in them days. Like now you go in a store, you can buy everything from a shirt to a banana.

Y: I like having a garden. I like that idea. I mean why should we go to the grocery store, if you can get fresh vegetables from your own garden?

H: Oh yes, that was wonderful!

Y: Did you have any garden by yourself?

H: Oh no, I never had, I never had a garden, no. No, I never.

Y: That was your father's?

H: Yeah, yeah.

Y: What was your father's? How did he know about sauerkraut? Was he German, or Polish?

H: No, no, my father was Scotch Irish you know, but that was the thing them days. Like sauerkraut, everybody liked it them days.

Y: I thought sauerkraut was, (H: well it is a German, it is a German) it belonged to the Germans, the Polish, and the eastern [unclear].

H: Yeah, well it is a German vegetable really, but see, not if you had a patch of cabbage, see, now if you didn't eat that maybe in a month, or two, it would go bad. You make sauerkraut, you can keep it all year, you know? I imagine that was the idea of it.

Y: Also they probably shared with other people. (H: Hm?) They probably gave it to the neighbors. Oh yes, my mother used to give everything away. My father used to go crazy sometimes. You know, he'd pick stuff, like a lot (--)

SIDE I ENDS

SIDE II BEGINS

Y: When is lunch?

H: Oh I might have to go out for lunch today. (Y: Out?) No, I'll got to McDonald's. I don't eat fish, you know, and they're having fish today. But I was going to stay there if you know, if they did, but she said, no, I don't have any people that are not coming. So I said, okay, forget it. I used to go out to McDonald's every Friday.

Y: What about Victory Gardens later?

H: Well yeah, Victory Gardens, that was a big thing during the war. But I was in the service, you know, I didn't have the Victory Garden, but most of a lot of people did. And it was wonderful.

Y: Right. How, as you know, people talk about satisfaction, you know, doing something well. And so was there such a thing when you worked here at the mills? I mean did you feel really satisfied doing something good job, or (--)

H: Uh, I'd say so many of the people just done their work and that was it. They didn't you know, they didn't care. But like I say, maybe 30% of them were conscientious and they done the, you know (--)

Y: I noticed that you did not like Western Electric much. What was the reason, you told me before, but it wasn't on the tape.

H: Well it's, more or less, I've got to say this, it was the people in there. I worked there six months, right, and there was forty, in my department there was forty men. Well I knew three of them before, from you know, I went to school with, or I knew them outside. Now I was there six months. I'd say I wasn't on talking terms with ten of them. Everybody rushing around, you know, doing their work and not, and they were like, I'd say more like clicky, you know what I mean? Like I don't even know what a click is, you know, they were more friends with each other. You were like an outsider. Maybe if I stayed there long enough I would be in, but in six months if you don't get to talk to you know, so many people, you figure hey, maybe they don't like me, I don't know. Maybe they didn't like me. Because when I went on that job in Western, I learned that job in one week. And my boss told me, gee this is wonderful, because I know, I had done, like I had weighed up wool, different grades and different colors, and different, and this was all, liked you'd have to look in the [unclear] to see where all of these pots were and you'd go and get them. Well I was used to doing that, you know? And even when I gave them my notice, he says, if you ever want a job again, he says, come back and see me.

Y: What was your job at Western? (H: Stock selector) Stock selector?

H: Stock selector. We used to pick all the different parts for telephones and all different things and put them in either a tray, or boxes, or a big job. We have cartons of stuff, you know. Whatever. And they used to take that and deliver it to the departments that, and they had all the parts to work with. If they had to take this apart and put in a phone, and take that part and put in a phone, they'd soldered it, or whatever, you know?

Y: Well I don't understand how weighing the wool helped you?

H: Well more or less on the same principle. I had to go look for this wool. You know, the wool that I'm talking about is these colors and shades, and different things, they were all spread around this big warehouse, you know. There was thousands of pounds. And we had a [cardex] where

when the crew to put it away, they had to put on that [cardex] where it was. See. Like where they had post numbers. They'd put one, two, whatever post, what bay, we used to call them bays. Whatever by number, well I had to go there and find that wool, and bring it to the scale, and weigh it and then bring it back. Well this was the same principle. You found all your, where your stuff was in these bins and boxes and that, and you went and you got the you know, product. And you put it in your tray, and then you went to the next item and you put that in the tray. Of course you had to put everything in little envelopes, or boxes. You might have ten of one thing, and twenty of another, or something. You know, whatever parts went in a phone, maybe, say that we're making 50 phones, you know, you have fifty of this, maybe one hundred of this, maybe two hundred of this thing. All little diodes, and I forget, you know, I forget what they call them now, but anyway. All different little things. You know, they go, they'd take this and they'd weld them on where they were suppose to, solder them rather where they were suppose to be soldered. And uh (--)

Y: Did you take an exam before you started?

H: No. No.

Y: No exam?

H: No, no I didn't.

Y: And what about the cage you were talking about?

H: Oh that's where I worked? The cage. Well see, it was, the room must be four times bigger than this place there, right? And it was all caged in so nothing would fall over to the workers. The workers were right down below us all sides, see. And like I say, everything was spread around. It was not you know, like I say, what section, what you were going to get. You go to that section and get what you had to get and then you look at your paper again, you go to this section and get what you had to get. Count them, or whatever. And if it was a big amount, like say it's two or three hundred, they had scales on each one. Like you put one, one of these diodes here, and you put ten here and it even off. If you wanted a hundred you put ten here, and you just take a hand full and put them in there, and you could either add more and take them apart. I don't know what they call that scale now. I forget. But that's the way it works, you know? You didn't have to count them then. It was much easier and much faster.

Y: So some people were out of cage, some people were in cage.

H: Well like I say, there was forty of us there. (Y: In the cage?) Yeah.

Y: Did you feel like a bird captured there, or?

H: Oh no, no, no, no. (Y: No) No, not really. (Y: I mean those uh) Well I tell you, you were so busy you didn't, you didn't uh, it wasn't that that bothered me. That didn't bother me. No. (Y: No.) No, no.

Y: What about some people had the nervous breakdown I heard from other people.

H: Well I don't know if I should say it again, I said it before, (Y: well say it, because I mean) but it's true though.

Y: You told us that on the radio, so.

H: Yeah, all right. Sure. Well even Robert Costello told you, it was right, it's true. I know it's true. I know it's true, hey. You know, and when you work with a woman, and even in my job too, your bonus, not what you did, what everybody did. Like if (--)

Y: I don't understand that one. I mean how your job related to other people? Or how did other people affected your bonus.

H: Well that's the way it was set up.

Y: Can you explain that? Can you explain that?

H: Well no, but that's the way they set it up.

Y: I mean if I do my job, if I assemble those parts in my little envelope, and if I do that slow, how does it affect you? That's my job and I produced it.

H: Yeah, but that's it. That's the way it was set up in the beginning. They know, them people are smart you know. They know if you're slow, and the people are fast, you're going to try to get fast as them, you know what I mean? So they, that's another thing now. That never happened to me, but I know a lot of like I say, women, they're working right? There's some, people are not all the same. They might be slower you know? And these other women, and I'll say this, women are not as nice as men I don't think. When they get mad at somebody, they're mad, you know? And like I say, now there's twenty people on this bonus, right, and there's maybe one or two of them that are just going slow. These other eighteen are going to be made at him, you know what I mean? They maybe won't speak to them as sociable as they, you know. But that's the way they set that up.

Y: I mean how, how did they get their [unclear], because of the [unclear]?

H: Well probably because they couldn't stand the, how can I say it? Turn that thing off for a minute. I'm trying to think of the word. The pressure and the tension, and you know.

Y: And do you know anyone who got(--)

H: No, I don't really know. No, I don't know anybody.

Y: But you heard stories?

H: Oh I heard stories, yeah. Anybody, everybody heard stories.

Y: Besides Frank's daughter, do you know anyone else?

H: Oh well, I don't know her personally, but it's a known fact. I mean you know, hey, I don't (--)

Y: So you quit after six months. (H: Yeah) Would other places, other work places like you call that cage, were there other places with nicknames?

H: Well no, every other one had a section. They would, like all the woman, most of the woman worked, well there were some men down there too. But they worked in sections. And that section is what they've put out. That was their bonus, you know, whatever they put out. There was a section chief, and then there was a layout operator.

Y: Layed out?

H: Layout! Layout operator. They used to give the work out, you know, like whatever was to be done. They used to give the work out to the people that they called. Because they had, they had to know what they were doing.

Y: But uh, the Western Electric I can imagine had better benefits than the mills, didn't they?

H: Oh yes, they did have benefits. Well uh, like I say now, they did have more benefits, yeah, they had more benefits than the mill.

Y: And you worked first at the Wood Mill you started? (H: Yeah, yeah) And then you moved to where? [Words unclear]

H: Uh, wood mill. You now, in between I worked a couple of years in Lowell in a cookie factory. (Y: Umhm) Educator Cracks. I worked in the warehouse there.

Y: So, and then returned to(--)

H: And then I went to Stevens Mill.

Y: Stevens Mill. And then afterwards you went to (H: Andrew Wilson) Andrew Wilson. When did you work at the restaurant then?

H: Well in between, when I was (Y: between the uh), no, no, (Y: Stevens) when I was in Stevens I gave my notice and I got the job in Western the same day. I worked there six months. In the meantime the superintendent of the mill called me back and he told me I can give you more money and you'll have the job. So I figured uh, I might as well go back. I like the job better than here, so I'll go back. I'm not, in them days I'm not thinking of retirement and this and that. I'm just doing a days work. I don't expect to be living to 75 years old. I have only one, my sister lived to be 82. My other two brothers and my sister, they died in their 50's. So I never expected to live till 75. Hey, I, I have sugar diabetes. I had heart trouble. I could have three, three heart attacks. I got, I got to take insulin. I got to take ten pills a day. I've been taking ten

pills a day now for ten years. But the insulin I've been taking only two years. Two, or three years, I don't know which.

Y: Did you smoke?

H: No, I don't smoke.

Y: You never smoked?

H: No, I never smoked. And beside that I'm blind almost. I could be legally blind. See what I drive with? That's what I drive with. But I had to go to Boston to get all these glasses. I read with these and I wear these around the street. Now these glasses here, they cost me four hundred and fifty dollars. And these here cost me two hundred. And all, when I went to Boston, the Retna Clinic, Medicare would not pay nothing for them.

Y: So all of these jobs you did, which one did you like the best?

H: Work is work. It's hard to say. (Y: it's hard to say?) Oh yeah. Well when the union came in the wood mill, I'd say when I come back from the service, till they closed down, I liked it better there. (Y: Wood mill?) Yeah.

Y: When did you come back? 1944? 45?

H: No, I come back 1945. (Y: 45?) Yeah.

Y: And then you stayed there until(--)

H: Until it closed down.

Y: 19 uh (--) What did you do there?

H: Well the titled of the job was the top carrier.

Y: Top?

H: Top, T O P. You know a big ball of wool, that's called a top. And we, we were called top carriers. We used to deliver this wool to the drawing rooms. Now I had a job there that uh (--)

Y: You did the same job until it closed down? Top carrier?

H: Well at first I didn't have, yeah, that's right.

Y: What did you like about that?

H: Well I had a good job in the last maybe ten years there. I (--)

Y: What made it good? What was good?

H: Well it made it good. Sometimes I'd do maybe five hours work a week. Yeah, because that was my job. Now see they used to send me orders down from the main office. They had a swatch of wool on it, whatever the thing was. Now if I had maybe fifty of them in a week, I'd have to find all of these things and weigh them, and bring them to the drawing room. But then when we're making government wool they made it in 50 thousand pound you now, 50 thousand pound order, right? To the first card, I used to make out the first card and the last card. And I'd bring the first truck to the drawing room, I wouldn't have to bother with that for two or three weeks. And then maybe, like in the drawing room there was let's see, ten, fifteen, I think there was about what they used to call twenty sets. Each would have a different you know, type, a different order, you know, but some of them would have two, or three of the same. If it was like I say, the government work, maybe two or three of them would have the same. But that first truck, I had to bring the first truck. And there was another man that took care of ten sets. He had to bring all the rest of that up during the length of the order, you know? And when that order would be going down, naturally they'd notify the office and they'd send another order, or something. I used to have like I say, some weeks I used to have it beautiful. I was hanging around more than anything.

Y: What did you, how did you spend your time?

H: Well that was the title of my job, and the union says I didn't have to do nothing else. See, that's why I say, the union is good in some ways, but in that way, no they weren't good. Because I was getting paid for doing hardly anything, but the union said that's my job, that's what I do.

Y: How did you spend your time?

H: Oh, I used to read. (Y: read?) Yeah, I used to read. I used to walk around the mill. (Y: Around where?) Around the mill. A lot of time some boss would, hey, what are you doing in here? I'd say, oh I'm just looking over to see how things run, you know. And they said okay. Don't stay too long, you know. But I used to sleep a lot of places too. (Y: Sleep, really?) Sure. Sure.

Y: I mean sleep sleep, or?

H: Oh yeah, sleep, really sleep.

Y: If they catch you then don't they say?

H: Well that's the thing now. I'm talking about, you know the Wood Mill, how long it is right? Well the cellar where we work, the top cellar, the two sides were all one all the way, all the way. A quarter of a mile each thing. And we had all wool, and trucks of wool there. And bags of wool. Now they don't go down there. It's not like a dungeon, but it's, it's down below the whole mill. And I don't think a boss would come down there once in a month. You were doing your job, you know what I mean? And you were, it was no, you know, nothing to look for. Some of the bosses might have known what was going on. But what could they do? You wouldn't let

them do nothing even if they caught me sleeping.

Y: [Chuckles] What union was that?

H: The CIO, AFOL CIO. It was the CIO then. I think it's both now. Yeah, and were there other people like you working ten hours?

Y: Well I had the best job in that cellar. I had the best job in that cellar. But a lot of people you know, like I say, if you done your work fast and you had a couple of hours to spare, you could you know, hand around and talk, and whatever, you know, because your work was being done. It was no, you know, there was nobody waiting for work, you know, that you had any stoppage. Just you, if you wanted to, like some, like say some of the old timers there, now if they got a job like that they would take all day to do that. You know what I mean? They'd bring up one there and put it in the bin, [unclear] you know, the tops in the bin. Then they'd come down and they'd hang around a couple of minutes. And they'd take another truck and they'd go to some other bin. And they'd make their job last. But the younger people, you know, like us, hey, they didn't uh, like I said, the union said that job was that and that was your job. And that's what you did.

Y: Nobody could touch you huh?

H: No. But see, now like I say, that's probably what helped the mills to move south, you know. But they didn't go anything good, because there's unions down there now, and the people down there don't work as hard as they work up here. They you know, they're not as fast a worker. They're kind of a slow living people. Like J.P. Stevens all move down there, right? After they closed our mill they were wishing they were back again where we were. The only thing like, it's some of these mills, like the one I worked at, there was no bus to go there and it was hard to get there, you know what I mean? They always had trouble getting help, because you had to have a car, or you had to get a ride from somebody else to get over there.

Y: I wanted to ask you. How did people, I heard that people used to play games and things, and tell jokes. Some people, even Italians smuggled in wine. What did you see around you?

H: Well probably. Now that's(-- You know what I see? Now I know the people you're talking about. They're talking about after the union.

Y: After the union came in?

H: When the union came in, all right. Like I say, the union says my job is this, I done that. That's it. The same way with them. I know you were talking to Helen. She was a doffer, what they call a doffer. Well they maybe had ten frames to take of, you know. Well they doffed this frame and then they maybe sit down for ten or fifteen minutes, or like you say, they might have played games. Then another frame they'd have to doff, they'd have to do that. Or sometime they'd have two or three doff at the same time. Well they'd have to work maybe an hour or two steady, and then afterwards they'd have the time to stop. But like I say, the union says, that's your job and that's what you do.

Y: I bet you liked the unions then?

H: Yeah, everybody liked the union then. That's what they liked, that's why they all liked the union. And that's why J. P. Stevens, you know, that's why they didn't want a union. They knew what was going on in these other mills.

Y: How did they stop? I thought it was against the law. They cannot say.

H: Well then they were against the law. If you have ten mills, right, and this mill wants to go and be in the union, you don't give this mill any work. You give it all to the other mills. And these people are out slack time. (Y: What can you do?) And like I say, there wasn't, there wasn't a lot of jobs like today. Even when the union was in, there wasn't the jobs that there is today. Today you can get a job in ten minutes. Turn it off, I'll tell you a joke. I never told you a joke. I've told you the joke before.

Y: Don't worry, tell me.

H: All right. Not on there, this is dirty.

Y: Why not, tell me. We can clean it later.

H: Okay. These two guys were working together, see. And the guy says, oh God your breath smells bad. He said, well if you kissed as many asses to get this job your breath would smell too. [laughs]

Y: Yeah. Yeah, you told me.

H: I might have told you that before. But that's, that's a true statement, I mean you know what I mean. I'm not making these things up. Before the union you had to beg for a job. And after the union, like I say, it's, you still have to you know, cowtell a little bit to the boss, or whatever. Because he was the commander and chief.

Y: Do you know any other jokes like that?

H: No, I don't know.

Y: That's the only joke you know?

H: I know a lot of dirty jokes.

Y: Dirty joke, doesn't matter. I mean, but work, work?

H: No, not about work. (Y: Not about the work?) No, not about work. (Y: No?) No.

Y: And so if you, some people say that they went work. Before that, let me ask you that. When you were at the Western Electric, did you know what the end product was? What did you

produce? What was your contribution to the end product? Did you see what you produced there?

H: Well yeah. Of course they had these in the lobby of the entrance, telephones. That's what they made there, telephones, you know. And big switchboards. Switchboards, they were as wide as this room, right? Or maybe say, half as wide as this room, right? And they were twice as high. And they had about a million wires. And these people had to solder every wire where they were suppose to solder. They had to read the blue prints. you know, they, them jobs paid pretty good I guess. But you never seen, you never seen one of them finished, because they'd chip them right out where they were suppose to go, or whatever.

Y: Yeah. And according to some statement, they say if you give a raise to your worker, it will encourage him or her for six months. But if you make compliment it will last one year. So compliment uh (--) Did you expect from you section hands, or from your superiors to be complimented? I mean did you (--)

H: Oh yes! I, I, I'm not bragging, but I was always complimented on my work. When I worked in Steven, not the boss, they didn't exactly give me his job, because he made too much. But I got like a foreman's pay, you know? He was, that's, after he got real sick he had to quit. But he used to like me all the time. And he knew I did my work and I done it right. And even, we got to be friends. We went out a few times, my wife and his wife went to a nightclub, or we went to his house, and he came to my house, you know, for a Saturday night supper, or something like that. We were friends really. And then when I worked the Wood Mill of course, I used to chum around with the bosses son, but that was after the union came in. Before that I didn't. After the union came in I used to be friends. Well he didn't, he didn't work in the mill before when I was there anyway. Even when he came in after. And we were friends, and we, him and a lot of our friends that worked with us in the [unclear], what I call a [unclear], that's where I worked, we always used to go our on a Saturday here or there, do this or do that, whatever. Got to a fight, or go to a ball game, or something, you know?

Y: I mean did you always try to do your best when you had a job?

H: Hey, do you know what I always said? I said it's harder to duck work than to do it. You know a lot of people, they try to, they go on job and they try to duck, you know, doing this, or doing that. And they're always on edge. They look at the boss, you know he's always, he watching them. He knows who they are. And uh, I always said it. To do your, if you do your work it's easier than trying to goof off. Like even in [unclear] Wilson now, you get a job, or you'd be doing a job, you know, making some parts, and a lot of the guys, you know, they'd do so much and they go to the toilet. And they come back and they'd do some more, and do that, and the boss would be always looking at him. You know, and he'd be made at him, but he wouldn't say nothing, because he knew there was a union too, you know. But, like me now, I, if they give me a job, I'd do it till it was finished, then I might take a break, you know what I mean? Like I had a foreman, he lives in Haverhill, [unclear] Wilson. He told the whole crew, every time he had a special job he'd give it to me. He told them, he says, hey, I give this to Harold, I know it's going to be done. And he fought for me a couple of times, because just on a count of(--) In our crew we had like maybe 12 people, and then we had four road men. They were what

they call erection men. So anyway for about two months I wasn't getting any, going out on the road you know. You're suppose to, they're suppose to give you turns you know. So he says, he come to me one day, he says Harold, I haven't seen you go out on the road lately. I said, well jeeze, I don't know, Lenny don't sent me, my regular foreman, you know? But he don't sent me. So he says, he don't huh? He says, why? I says, I don't know why. He says, okay. So he went and talked to my, my foreman was mad at me you know. And he said, hey Don, Don Wilson was talking. His name was Wilson too. He says, Don Wilson was talking to me and giving me hell. I said, well Lenny, don't blame me. I said, I didn't say nothing. I said, I don't want to get in trouble with you. He asked me why I don't go out on the road anymore. I said, well, you don't sent me, right? He said, yeah, he said, okay, well you'll get your share and more now for awhile so you catch up to the other guys. Like we were helpers. Now when we, we had these four road men, they each had a service vehicle. And if you were helpful you'd go out with him, and you'd stay there till the job is finished, no matter how long it took. A day, or a week, or two weeks. In fact we used to go overnight for a week, for three or four days, a week, or sometime two weeks. They used to pay for everything. Meals, hotels, even (--)

Y: Yeah. So in other words you tried to do your best?

H: I always did!

Y: But not people around you always did, or not everyone uh (--)

H: Hey, like I say, always, even, like I say, even [unclear], they did more work trying to get out of work than if they just done the job and forget about it.

Y: Um, so the other people just fooled around?

H: Not everybody.

Y: Not everybody. Right, right.

H: You know what I say. Hey, in any job there's a goof off, or two goof offs, you know what I mean? They try to do as little as they can.

Y: What is your impression there? Most of the people tried to goof off, or most of the people tried to do [unclear]? Your opinion.

H: Well I'd say 50, well it all depends. I'd say 75 are conscientious, 25 you know, not as conscientious, that's all.

Y: Well thank you very very much. And that is the end of the [tape reel?].

H: Okay.

The end.

